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March 22, 1976 Government Publications

ADVISORY PANEL TO THE MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The Special Advisory Panel appointed by the Federal Minister of the Environment for the purpose of reviewing and identifying gaps in the impact study of the proposed expansion of Vancouver International Airport and making recommendations to the Minister has completed its assignment after two years of confidential work. The Panel originally appointed by the Hon. Jack Davis and later continued by his successor the Hon. Mme. Jeanne Sauve, consists of persons well known for their concern for environmental issues. The members are Mrs. Helen Boyce, Chairman, a member of Vancouver City Council; Dr. Ian McTaggart-Cowan, a member of the National Environmental Advisory Council; Mr. Will Paulik, Executive Assistant to the B. C. Wildlife Federation; Mr. Gary Gallon, Executive Director of SPEC Federation; and Mr. John Creery, lawyer and founder of the Greater Vancouver Citizens' Committee on Noise Abatement.

The Panel is not a member of the Airport Planning Committee but is a separate and independent body that reported directly to the Minister of the Environment. It is a matter of concern to the Panel that its appointment was not continued

by the Hon. Jean Marchand, newly appointed Minister of the Environment, who in his previous position as Minister of Transport headed the government department most actively advancing the proposals for airport expansion.

It might be thought that in view of the \$2,000,000 said to have been spent, the various studies conducted concerning the proposed expansion of the airport were fully comprehensive and complete in all important respects. Such is not the case. The Minister's Advisory Panel, after intensive review of the impact studies, found and reported to the Minister a number of significant gaps in the impact studies. Consideration of these inadequacies has led to the whole-hearted endorsement by the Panel of the basic recommendation of the Department of the Environment that all proposed developments in the Fraser River estuary and delta, including proposed airport expansion, be suspended until a comprehensive policy is prepared for the management and protection of the Estuary and Delta as a vitally important ecological unit. Existing studies show that development without such a policy may destroy the area as an ecological unit, with disastrous environmental and economic consequences.

The Advisory Panel has seen time that was said not to have been available for further study in fact elapse before completion of the final report of the A.P.C. Further, money

that should be expended in developing an estuarine policy for the Fraser and in closing the information gaps has so far not been forthcoming for such purposes and instead millions of dollars are now proposed by the M.O.T. to be expended upon an expansion that would be undertaken in ignorance of its effect upon the ecology of the Fraser estuary and delta, and other aspects of the environment, and the livability of the region with significant attendant social and economic costs that have not yet been studied and estimated.

The significant study gaps may be summarized as follows:

I. EFFECTS OF DREDGING AND FILLING

Evidence of experts in the Fisheries and Marine Service of the D.O.E. establishes the need for establishment of a plan for the total dredging requirements for the proposed expansion and also the need for further study concerning the effects of

- (a) dredging required to be carried out in the Fraser River, particularly in the North Arm, in order to supply the huge quantities of fill required for any new runway, whether inside or outside of Sea Island dyke, and related facilities; and

(b) filling any portion at all of Sturgeon Bank on the seaward side of the Sea Island dyke.

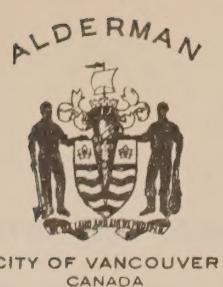
This evidence is that among the effects could quite possibly be

- (c) increased erosion of the end of Point Grey, posing ever greater difficulty for the University of British Columbia;
- (d) accelerated dispersal of unacceptable sewage contaminants to the beaches of Vancouver, West Vancouver and southern Howe Sound;
- (e) significant and perhaps irreversible damage to the salmon fishery.

Fixed and specific development proposals, instead of the vague concepts suggested by the M.O.T. for the A.P.C. study process, and further intensive, properly funded studies carried out over the necessary time span are required in order to obtain vitally required knowledge in these areas.

II. COMPARATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AT ALTERNATIVE SITES

No comparative studies have been made of the environmental impact of alternative airport sites situated within the lower mainland region. The Ecological Sub-Committee of the A.P.C. itself recommended that such studies should be carried out but nothing has been done. Such studies as were conducted concerning alternative sites have been severely



30 March, 1976

Mr. M.J. Romaine,
Assistant Director,
Lands Directorate,
Pacific Region,
Room 400, 1001 W. Pender Street,
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 2M7.

Dear Mr. Romaine:

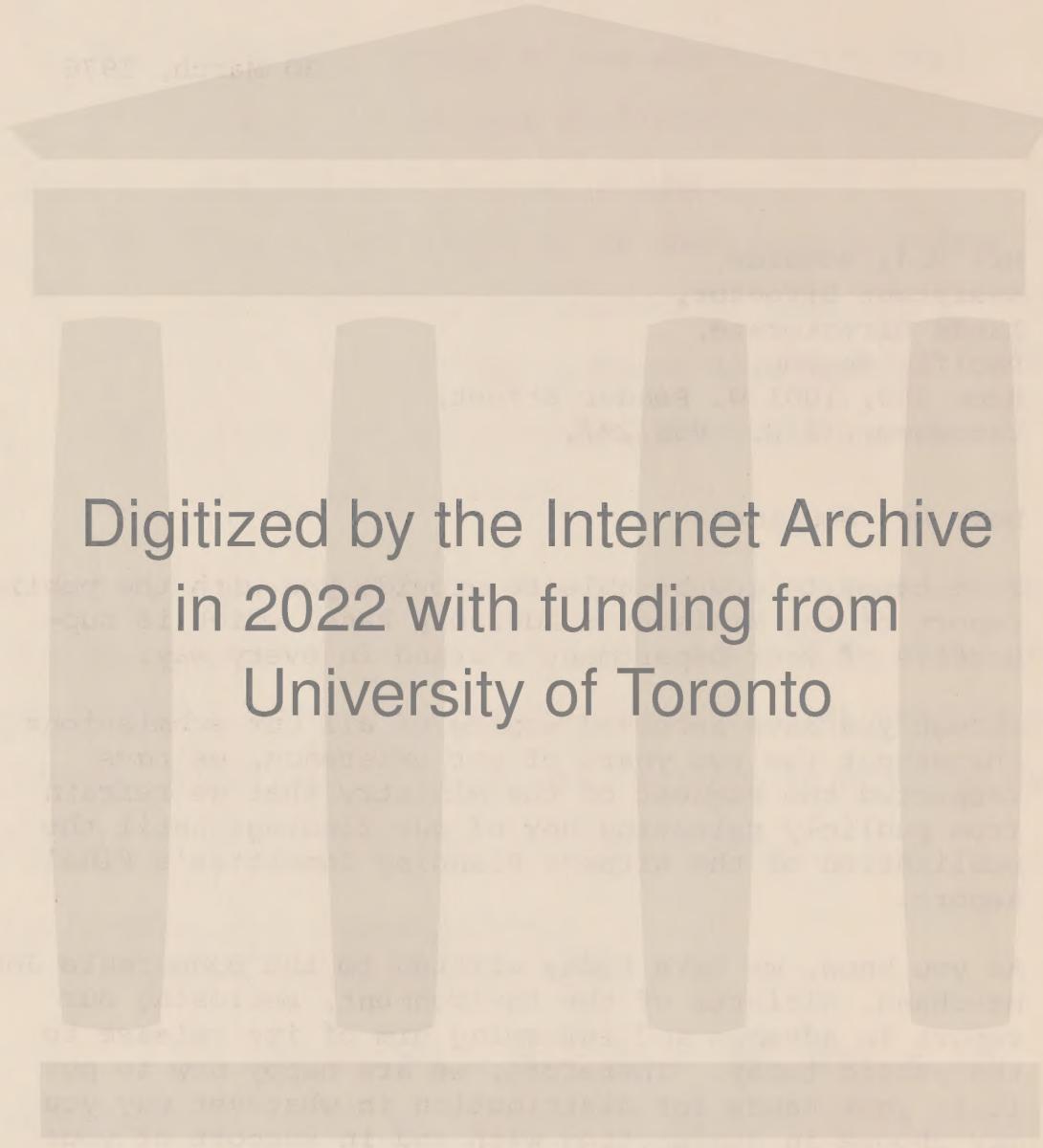
I am happy to now be able to provide you with the public report of the Minister's Advisory Panel which is supportive of your Department's stand in every way.

Though you have received copies of all our submissions throughout the two years of our existence, we have respected the request of the Ministry that we refrain from publicly releasing any of our findings until the publication of the Airport Planning Committee's Final Report.

As you know, we have today written to the Honourable John Marchand, Minister of the Environment, enclosing our report in advance and informing him of its release to the public today. Therefore, we are happy now to put it in your hands for distribution in whatever way you may choose in conjunction with and in support of your Department's findings.

Yours sincerely,

Helen D. Boyce (Alderman),
Chairman, Advisory Panel to the
Minister of the Environment on
the Proposed Vancouver Airport
Expansion.



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criticized by members of the A.P.C., including the Community Forum, the City of Vancouver and others, and in no way dealt with comparative environmental impacts.

III. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE POLICIES

There has been no consideration given to the environmental impact of alternative policies in matters such as transportation, energy, and relocation of other than airline passenger traffic.

IV. EFFECT ON LIVABILITY

The Advisory Panel has determined that insufficient studies have been made concerning the impact of the proposed expansion on the livability of the adjacent residential and recreational areas. In particular

- (a) noise studies are inadequate and in vital aspects are based only upon simulated or hypothetical conditions rather than actual conditions; and
- (b) no social impact study has been carried out.

There has not been any proper study of the social and economic effects of placing a main runway, its approach flight paths, and the entire complex of related facilities over a mile closer to the residential sections of southern

Vancouver, Burnaby, New Westminster, the University of British Columbia, the University Endowment Lands, the five golf courses adjacent to the North Arm of the Fraser River, and the recreational area planned for the western end of the North Arm.

V. EFFECT ON FRASER ESTUARY AND DELTA

Most important of all, an over-all policy for the management and protection of the Fraser River estuary and delta must be prepared and put into effect. The proposed expansion, when taken in conjunction with the more than 21 other unrelated developments planned for the area, could result in the destruction of the area as an ecological unit. Already nearly 80% of the original Fraser River estuary and delta wetlands have been destroyed by dyking and filling.

The Fraser River is one of the greatest salmon producing rivers in the world. The annual commercial catch was valued in 1973 at \$73 million. Based upon estimates of un-utilized natural habitat and presently planned enhancement projects, the potential annual commercial catch can be more than doubled.

The Federal and Provincial Governments have agreed jointly to spend \$350 million over the next ten years to enhance the fish stock in the Salmonid Enhancement Program in B.C. By far the greatest proportion of the expenditure

will be in respect of the Fraser River. It would be an inexcusable waste of public funds to spend millions of dollars upon the proposed expansion in the absence of the required knowledge and a proper policy for the estuary and delta. The potential destruction of a rich source of food has great economic significance to the people of B.C. as well as great practical consequence for world food supply.

PROPOSED SHORT RUNWAY

Presumably as a result of the serious environmental consequences presented by the M.O.T.'s concepts for the proposed new runway, the M.O.T. suggested in the fall of 1975 that the new runway be 9250 feet long and located within the present Sea Island dyke. This proposal was made after all the studies carried out by the A.P.C. were virtually completed.

The Advisory Panel has recommended to the Minister that a detailed environmental analysis of such a runway be made before any decision is reached. All of the study gaps referred to above apply in respect of the consideration of a shorter runway and, in addition, a further noise problem could well be introduced if a shorter runway led to more frequent use of reverse-thrust to stop jet aircraft upon landing.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Whilst the terms of reference of the Panel were environmental in nature, the Panel considers that it would be remiss in its implicit duty to act in the public interest if it failed to emphasize that the comparative importance of any need for expansion and of social and environmental priorities has not been assessed in any way. It is common ground that the Airport Planning Committee study process was significantly altered and was not carried out as intended. The issuance of the A.P.C. report tends to obscure that fact. The Committee was created by the Tri-Level Committee of the Municipal, Provincial and Federal Governments and was to make its final report to that body. Instead, the final report has apparently been delivered to the Federal Minister of Transport.

Consideration intended to be given to the report by the political representatives of the Tri-Level Committee appears destined to be avoided. The question arises how value judgments are to be made on the technical findings available.

The Advisory Panel therefore recommends to the Minister of the Environment that, to ensure full appreciation of the environmental impacts and consequences of the proposed

expansion and of the vital and important gaps in the study of such impacts, full public hearings should be held in the areas proposed to be affected. The Panel further recommends to the Minister that the Department of the Environment attend such hearings and present its findings and recommendations, including the steps that should be taken in establishing a policy for the Fraser River estuary and delta.

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